

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 1100

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT MP  
SUBJECT: MAURITIAN ELECTIONS: HOW THEY LOOK WITH ONE  
WEEK TO GO

1. ONE WEEK BEFORE THE MAURITIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR A NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IT IS CLEAR THAT WE HAVE A THREE-WAY RACE BETWEEN: (A) THE MARXIST PARTY, THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) ON THE LEFT; (B) THE GOVERNMENT COALITION OF THE LABOR AND MUSLIM PARTIES RUNNING AS THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY (IP) IN THE CENTER; AND (C) THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) ON THE RIGHT. AT THE MOMENT IT APPEARS THAT THE MMM AND THE IP ARE RUNNING NECK-AND-NECK WITH ABOUT A THIRD OF THE VOTE EACH, WHILE THE PMSD TRAILS WITH PERHAPS TWENTY PERCENT. IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT ANY ONE OF THE THREE MAJOR PARTIES WILL WIN AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, WHICH MEANS THAT SOME SORT OF COALITION GOVERNMENT -- MOST PROBABLY BETWEEN THE CENTER AND THE RIGHT -- WILL HAVE TO BE FORMED AFTER THE ELECTIONS TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY.

2. TWENTY-ONE PARTIES REGISTERED CANDIDATES FOR THE SEVENTY SEATS IN THE NEW ASSEMBLY AND ABOUT 360 CANDIDATES IN ALL ARE STILL IN THE FIELD. BUT NONE OF THE SMALLER PARTIES HAS BEEN ABLE TO MOBILIZE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTERY, AND, EXCEPT FOR MAKING THE OUTCOME DIFFICULT TO PREDICT, THEY ARE NOT A FACTOR. THE MAURITIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM -- DESIGNED TO ASSURE AT LEAST SOME REPRESENTATION TO ALL THE BROAD ETHNIC COMMUNITIES (HINDUS, MUSLIMS, CREOLES AND CHINESE)  
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-- COMPLICATES THE PICTURE BECAUSE THE THREE SEATS IN EACHO DISTRICT ARE AWARDED TO THOSE CANDIDATES RECEIVING THE LARGEST

NUMBER OF VOTES NO MATTER HOW SMALL THE PLURALITY. FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS FOR SIXTY-TWO SEATS, AN ADDITIONAL EIGHT SEATS ARE AWARDED BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION TO CANDIDATES WHO LOST USING A COMPLEX FORMULA TO ASSURE SEATS TO UNDER-REPRESENTED COMMUNITIES.

3. THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY, AFTER A ROCKY START CAUSED BY HAVING TOO MANY APPLICANTS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR ITS CANDIDACIES, HAS LAUNCHED A VIGOROUS, WELL-FINANCED CAMPAIGN. IT HAS BEEN RUNNING ON ITS RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT AT THE HELM OF GOVERNMENT DURING THE EIGHT YEARS SINCE INDEPENDENCE, PROMISING CONTINUED STABILITY AND PROSPERITY, AND POSITIONING ITSELF AS THE TRUE SOCIALIST PARTY BETWEEN THE "COMMUNISM" OF THE MMM TO ITS LEFT AND THE "CAPITALISM" OF THEPMSD TO ITS RIGHT. IT HAS DE-EMPHASIZED COMMUNALIST APPEALS TO THE MAJORITY HINDU COMMUNITY WHICH TRADITIONALLY FORMS THE BULK OF ITS SUPPORT, BUT IT IS NEVERTHELESS COUNTING ON THE HINDUS TO DEMONSTRATE ONCE AGAIN THEIR LOYALTY TO THE LABOR COALITION. THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS BACKING LABOR STRONGLY, WITH FINANCING AND OTHERWISE, AS THE BEST GUARANTEE OF A CONTINUATION OF THE GOM'S MODERATE COURSE. LABOR HAS USED ITS CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT TO GOOD EFFECT AS IT HAS DECREED OR PROMISED A HOST OF POPULAR, VOTE-WINNING MEASURES INCLUDING WAGE INCREASES AND BONUSES, HIRING OF THE UNEMPLOYED, THE PROMISE OF FREE EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS IF IT IS RETURNED TO POWER, AND A PROGRAM OF FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL. PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM, 76 YEARS OLD AND SEEKING THE ELECTORATE'S VINDICATION ONE LAST TIME, SEEMS A FAIRLY SAFE BET TO WIN HIS SEAT, THOUGH THIS IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN.

4. THE MMM DOES NOT DENY ITS MARXIST ORIENTATION BUT HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO COUNTER THE RELENTLESS CHARGES OF BOTH THE IP AND THE PMSD THAT IT IS A COMMUNIST PARTY. THE MMM OFFERS THE ELECTORATE CHANGE, AND QUITE DRASTIC CHANGE, AS ITS PROGRAM CALLS FOR NATIONALIZATION OF A LARGE PORTION OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, PUBLIC TRANSPORT, THE DOCKS, INSURANCE COMPANIES AND BANKS AND 51 PERCENT OF CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES AND TOURIST HOTELS. THE PARTY APPEALS TO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM 18 TO 30 YEARS OLD (WHO MAKE UP OVER 40 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS),  
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THE WORKERS IT HAS ORGANIZED IN ITS UNIONS, THE UNEMPLOYED, A LARGE PORTION OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY, AND EVERYONE WHO HAS A GRIEVANCE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THIS PARTY HAS ALSO AROUSED A PERVASIVE FEAR AMONG THE CONSERVATIVE AND MODERATE ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION, WHO ANTICIPATE ECONOMIC CHAOS AND A LOSS OF FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES IF THE MMM COMES TO POWER. PAUL BERENGER, THE YOUNG (31) AND DYNAMIC PARTY LEADER, APPEARS TO BE LOSING A CLOSE RACE FOR A SEAT IN THE ASSEMBLY, BUT HIS PARTY IS RUNNING A WELL-ORGANIZED AND AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

5. GAETAN DUVAL (46), LONG-TIME LEADER OF THE PMSD, IS ALSO HAVING A TIGHT RACE FOR A SEAT IN A DIFFICULT DISTRICT HE CHOSE DELIBERATELY IN A SHOW OF BRAVADO. THE PMSD CAMPAIGN HAS GAINED MOMENTUM, FROM A WEAK POSITION WHEN ELECTIONS WERE CALLED, AND HAS SUCCEEDED IN RALLYING ITS TRADITIONAL SUPPORTERS IN THE URBAN AREAS, THE CREOLES AND FRANCO-MAURITIANS, SKILLED WORKERS IN THE UNIONS IT SPONSORS, AND ALL THOSE WHO DISLIKE LABOR BECAUSE OF ITS PRO-HINDU COMMUNALISM BUT WHO FEAR THE "COMMUNISTS" OF THE MMM EVEN MORE. THE PRIVATE SECTOR HEDGES ITS BETS BY FINANCING THIS PARTY AS WELL AS RAMGOOLAM'S. THE PMSD ADVOCATES A FREE ENTERPRISE ECONOMY, A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND CLOSE TIES WITH THE WEST. THE PARTY'S HOPES RIDE TO AN EXTRAORDINARY DEGREE ON THE PERSONAL CAMPAIGNING OF ITS CHARISMATIC LEADER. DUVAL HAS RECOVERED FROM HIS EARLIER DEPRESSED STATE TO LEAD A VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN. BUT THIS PARTY REMAINS VERY WEAK OUTSIDE THE URBAN AREAS, WHICH LIMITS THE NUMBER OF SEATS FOR WHICH IT CAN HOPE TO COMPETE.

6. EVEN THE MOST EXPERIENCED MAURITIAN OBSERVERS ARE DECLINING TO FORECAST THE OUTCOME, BUT THERE EXISTS A CONSENSUS OF SORTS THAT THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY WILL FINISH FIRST, THE MMM A STRONG SECOND AND THE PMSD A RESPECTABLE BUT DEFINITE THIRD. IF NO PARTY WINS A MAJORITY OF THE SEATS, A COALITION WILL BE IN ORDER. THE MMM HAS CHARGED THAT ITS TWO OPPONENTS ARE ALREADY RUNNING AS A COALITION AGAINST THE MMM'S ALLEGED "COMMUNIST" THREAT. THE IP AND THE PMSD VOCIFEROUSLY DENY IT, AS AN ACTUAL COALITION IN THE ELECTION WOULD COST THEM BOTH VOTES, BUT IT APPEARS LIKELY THESE TWO PARTIES WILL

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COALESCE INTO A WORKING AGREEMENT FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS, ASSUMING THAT TOGETHER THEY WIN AT LEAST 36 SEATS. THIS WOULD BE AN OUTCOME WHICH WOULD BE WELCOMED BY THE MODERATE MAURITIANS WHO ARE A MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION AND WHO GENUINELY FEAR THE PARTICIPATION OF THE MMM IN THEIR GOVERNMENT AS FORESHADOWING DRASTIC CHANGES IN ITS DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS, IN ITS DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM (A DECIDED RARITY IN THE THIRD WORLD), AND IN ITS TRULY NON-ALIGNED INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION.

KEELEY

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